


3/31/00

11

<div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">03/30/00</div>  <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">10398 U.S. PTO</div>	UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL (Small Entity) <i>(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 CFR 1.53(b))</i>	Docket No. Safoco-1
	Total Pages in this Submission 35	
TO THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS Box Patent Application Washington, D.C. 20231		
Transmitted herewith for filing under 35 U.S.C. 111(a) and 37 C.F.R. 1.53(b) is a new utility patent application for an invention entitled: <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; min-height: 40px;">Valve Actuator Apparatus</div>		
and invented by: <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; min-height: 40px;">Terry G. Young</div>		
If a CONTINUATION APPLICATION, check appropriate box and supply the requisite information:		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continuation <input type="checkbox"/> Divisional <input type="checkbox"/> Continuation-in-part (CIP) of prior application No.: <u>08/968,904</u>		
Which is a:		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continuation <input type="checkbox"/> Divisional <input type="checkbox"/> Continuation-in-part (CIP) of prior application No.: <u>08/206,424</u>		
Which is a:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Continuation <input type="checkbox"/> Divisional <input type="checkbox"/> Continuation-in-part (CIP) of prior application No.: _____		
Enclosed are:		
Application Elements		
1. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Filing fee as calculated and transmitted as described below		
2. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Specification having <u>17</u> pages and including the following:		
a. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Descriptive Title of the Invention		
b. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cross References to Related Applications <i>(if applicable)</i>		
c. <input type="checkbox"/> Statement Regarding Federally-sponsored Research/Development <i>(if applicable)</i>		
d. <input type="checkbox"/> Reference to Microfiche Appendix <i>(if applicable)</i>		
e. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Background of the Invention		
f. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brief Summary of the Invention		
g. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brief Description of the Drawings <i>(if drawings filed)</i>		
h. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Detailed Description		
i. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Claim(s) as Classified Below		
j. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Abstract of the Disclosure		

03/30/00
09/538881
10398 U.S. PTO

UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL
(Small Entity)

(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 CFR 1.53(b))

Docket No.
Safoco-1

Total Pages in this Submission
35

Application Elements (Continued)

3. ☒ Drawing(s) *(when necessary as prescribed by 35 USC 113)*
a. ☐ Formal b. ☒ Informal Number of Sheets 7
4. ☐ Oath or Declaration
a. ☐ Newly executed *(original or copy)* ☐ Unexecuted
b. ☐ Copy from a prior application (37 CFR 1.63(d)) *(for continuation/divisional application only)*
c. ☐ With Power of Attorney ☐ Without Power of Attorney
d. ☐ DELETION OF INVENTOR(S)
Signed statement attached deleting inventor(s) named in the prior application,
see 37 C.F.R. 1.63(d)(2) and 1.33(b).
5. ☐ Incorporation By Reference *(usable if Box 4b is checked)*
The entire disclosure of the prior application, from which a copy of the oath or declaration is supplied under
Box 4b, is considered as being part of the disclosure of the accompanying application and is hereby
incorporated by reference therein.
6. ☐ Computer Program in Microfiche
7. ☐ Genetic Sequence Submission *(if applicable, all must be included)*
a. ☐ Paper Copy
b. ☐ Computer Readable Copy
c. ☐ Statement Verifying Identical Paper and Computer Readable Copy

Accompanying Application Parts

8. ☐ Assignment Papers *(cover sheet & documents)*
9. ☐ 37 CFR 3.73(b) Statement *(when there is an assignee)*
10. ☐ English Translation Document *(if applicable)*
11. ☐ Information Disclosure Statement/PTO-1449 ☐ Copies of IDS Citations
12. ☒ Preliminary Amendment
13. ☒ Acknowledgment postcard
14. ☒ Certificate of Mailing
☐ First Class ☒ Express Mail *(Specify Label No.):* EL362272355US

UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL (Small Entity)

(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 CFR 1.53(b))

Docket No.
Safoco-1

Total Pages in this Submission
35

Accompanying Application Parts (Continued)

15. ☐ Certified Copy of Priority Document(s) (if foreign priority is claimed)
16. ☐ Small Entity Statement(s) - Specify Number of Statements Submitted: _____
17. ☐ Additional Enclosures (please identify below):

Fee Calculation and Transmittal

CLAIMS AS FILED

For	#Filed	#Allowed	#Extra	Rate	Fee
Total Claims	3	- 20 =	0	x \$9.00	\$0.00
Indep. Claims	3	- 3 =	0	x \$39.00	\$0.00
Multiple Dependent Claims (check if applicable) <input type="checkbox"/>					\$0.00
BASIC FEE					\$345.00
OTHER FEE (specify purpose) _____					\$0.00
TOTAL FILING FEE					\$345.00

- ☒ A check in the amount of **\$345.00** to cover the filing fee is enclosed.
- ☐ The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge and credit Deposit Account No. **02-4345** as described below. A duplicate copy of this sheet is enclosed.
- ☐ Charge the amount of _____ as filing fee.
- ☒ Credit any overpayment.
- ☒ Charge any additional filing fees required under 37 C.F.R. 1.16 and 1.17.
- ☐ Charge the issue fee set in 37 C.F.R. 1.18 at the mailing of the Notice of Allowance, pursuant to 37 C.F.R. 1.311(b).

Dated: **March 30, 2000**


Signature

C. James Bushman, Reg. No. 24,810
Browning Bushman
5718 Westheimer, Suite 1800
Houston, TX 77057
Tel.: (713) 266-5593
Fax: (713) 266-5169

cc:

CERTIFICATE OF MAILING BY "EXPRESS MAIL" (37 CFR 1.10)Applicant(s): **Terry G. Young**

Docket No.

Safoco-1-1Serial No.
To Be AssignedFiling Date
HerewithExaminer
To Be AssignedGroup Art Unit
To Be AssignedInvention: **Valve Actuator Apparatus**

I hereby certify that this Utility Patent Application Transmittal Letter and all referenced enclosures are
(Identify type of correspondence)

is being deposited with the United States Postal Service "Express Mail Post Office to Addressee" service under
37 CFR 1.10 in an envelope addressed to: The Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, D.C. 20231 on
March 30, 2000
(Date)

Jan C. Lipscomb

(Typed or Printed Name of Person Mailing Correspondence)

(Signature of Person Mailing Correspondence)

EL362272355US

("Express Mail" Mailing Label Number)

Note: Each paper must have its own certificate of mailing.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study population	
Age (years)	Mean (SD)
Male	55.2 (10.5)
Female	56.8 (11.2)
Marital status	
Married	78.5%
Single	21.5%
Education level	
High school or above	65.2%
Below high school	34.8%
Occupation	
Professional	12.3%
Managerial	18.7%
Technical	25.4%
Service	32.1%
Unemployed	11.5%
Income (USD/month)	
< 1000	15.6%
1000-2000	28.9%
2000-3000	35.2%
> 3000	20.3%
Health insurance	
Yes	89.1%
No	10.9%
Smoking status	
Smoker	22.4%
Non-smoker	77.6%
Alcohol consumption	
Regular	8.7%
Occasional	14.5%
Never	76.8%

In re Application of	§	Attorney Docket No.: Safoco-1-1
Terry G. Young	§	
Serial No.: To Be Assigned	§	
Filed: Herewith	§	Anticipated Art Unit No.: 3753
For: <i>Valve Actuator Apparatus and Method</i>	§	

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

Box Patent Application
Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, DC 20231

Sir:

Kindly amend the above-identified application as follows:

In the Title

Please amend the title as follows:

Valve Actuator Apparatus [and Method]

Below the title, please add the following heading and paragraph:

--CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation of U.S. Application Serial No. 08/968,904, filed on November 6, 1997, which is a continuation of U.S. Application Serial No. 08/206,424, filed on March 4, 1994.--

In the Claims

Please cancel Claims 1-20.

Please add the following new claims, 21-23:

--21. A valve actuator for moving a valve gate between open and closed valve positions within a valve body, said valve actuator comprising:

an operator assembly including:

(a) an operator housing defining a pressure chamber therein and having a fluid entry

port; and

(b) an operator member within said operator housing movable toward said valve body in response to pressurized fluid introduced into said operator housing pressure chamber through said fluid entry port; and

a bonnet assembly including:

(a) a bonnet housing securable to said valve body, said bonnet housing having a bonnet housing bore therethrough;

(b) an elongated bonnet stem having first and second ends, said stem being axially movable in said bonnet housing bore, unconnected at said first end to said operator member and securable at said second end to said valve gate for moving said valve gate to said open and closed valve positions;

(c) a spring for producing a biasing force opposing axial movement of said operator member toward said valve body;

(d) a contact member, separate from said operator member, having an outer flange, and rotatably and axially affixed to said first end of said bonnet stem, and having a surface facing said operator member for drive contact with said operator member;

(e) an upper spring retainer separate from said operator member and said contact member, coaxially surrounding and rotatable with respect to said bonnet stem and said contact member, and having an inner flange for engagement to said bonnet stem and to receive said movement of said operator member toward said valve body;

(f) a lower spring retainer coaxially surrounding said bonnet housing; and

(g) securing means connected to said bonnet housing in surrounding relationship therewith for longitudinally securing said operator housing to said bonnet housing, said securing means permitting removal of said operator assembly from said bonnet assembly leaving the

22. A valve actuator for moving a valve gate between open and closed valve positions within a valve body, said valve actuator comprising:

(a) an operator housing defining a pressure chamber therein and having a fluid entry port; and

a bonnet assembly including:

(b) an elongated bonnet stem having first and second ends, said stem being axially movable in said bonnet housing bore, unconnected at said first end to said operator member and securable at said second end to said valve gate for moving said valve gate to said open and closed valve positions, said first end of said bonnet stem being externally threaded;

(d) a contact member, separate from said operator member, having an outer flange, an internally threaded bore, and a surface facing said operator member for direct contact with said operator member, said threaded end of said bonnet stem being received in said threaded bore of said contact member;

(e) an upper spring retainer separate from said operator member and said contact

member, coaxially surrounding and rotatable with respect to said bonnet stem and said contact member, and having an inner flange for engagement of said outer flange of said contact member to transmit said biasing force to said bonnet stem and to receive said movement of said operator member toward said valve body;

(f) a lower spring retainer coaxially surrounding said bonnet housing; and

(g) securing means connected to said bonnet housing in surrounding relationship therewith for longitudinally securing said operator housing to said bonnet housing;

said operator assembly being removable intact from said bonnet assembly leaving the bonnet assembly intact to hold said valve closed when said operator assembly is removed.

23. A valve actuator for moving a valve gate between open and closed valve positions within a valve body, said valve actuator comprising:

an operator assembly including:

(a) an operator housing defining a pressure chamber therein and having a fluid entry port; and

(b) an operator member within said operator housing movable toward said valve body in response to pressurized fluid introduced into said operator housing pressure chamber through said fluid entry port; and

a bonnet assembly including:

(a) a bonnet housing securable to said valve body, said bonnet housing having a bonnet housing bore therethrough;

(b) an elongated bonnet stem having first and second ends, said stem being axially movable in said bonnet housing bore, unconnected at said first end to said operator member and securable at said second end to said valve gate for moving said valve gate to said open and closed

valve positions;

(c) a spring for producing a biasing force opposing axial movement of said operator member toward said valve body;

(d) a contact member, separate from said operator member, having an outer flange, and rotatably and axially affixed to said first end of said bonnet stem, and having a surface facing said operator member for drive contact with said operator member;

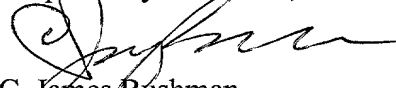
(e) an upper spring retainer separate from said operator member and said contact member, coaxially surrounding and rotatable with respect to said bonnet stem and said contact member, and having an inner flange for engagement of said outer flange of said contact member to transmit said biasing force to said bonnet stem and to receive said movement of said operator member toward said valve body;

(f) a lower spring retainer coaxially surrounding said bonnet housing; and

(g) securing means connected to said bonnet housing in surrounding relationship therewith for longitudinally securing said operator housing to said bonnet housing, said securing means including a base ring configured for rotation relative to said bonnet housing without affecting selected bonnet stem drift;

said operator assembly being removable intact from said bonnet assembly, leaving the bonnet assembly intact to hold said valve closed when said operator assembly is removed.--

Respectfully submitted,



C. James Bushman
Reg. No. 24,810

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Fax: (713) 266-5169

CERTIFICATE OF EXPRESS MAILING

I, Jan C. Lipscomb, hereby certify that this correspondence and all referenced enclosures are being deposited by me with the United States Postal Service as Express Mail with Receipt No. EL362272355US in an envelope addressed to Box Patent Application, Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, DC 20231, on March 30, 2000.

By: Jan C. Lipscomb

SPECIFICATION

Docket No.: Safoco-1-1/P1335

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

BE IT KNOWN that I, Terry G. Young, a citizen of the United States of America, residing in Spring, Texas, have invented new and useful improvements in a

VALVE ACTUATOR APPARATUS AND METHOD

of which the following is a specification:

CERTIFICATE OF EXPRESS MAILING

I, Jan C. Lipscomb, hereby certify that this correspondence and all referenced enclosures are being deposited by me with the United States Postal Service as Express Mail with Receipt No. EL362272355US in an envelope addressed to Box Patent Application, Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, DC 20231, on March 30, 2000.

By: 

Attorney Docket: Safoco01

VALVE ACTUATOR APPARATUS AND METHOD

1. FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to an actuator apparatus and method and, more particularly, to a valve actuator including a bonnet assembly having an improved downstop mechanism that is rotatably free with respect to a floating top shaft and engageable with respect to a replaceable operator without affecting bonnet stem drift adjustment.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Gate valves are generally comprised of a valve body having a central axis aligned with inlet and outlet passages, and a space between the inlet and outlet passages in which a slide, or gate, may be moved perpendicular to the central axis to open and close the valve. In the closed position, the gate surfaces typically seal against sealing rings which surround the fluid passage through the valve body. Gate valves have been used for centuries to control the flow of a great variety of fluids. Often the fluid to be controlled by the gate valve is under pressure. In the petroleum industry, gate valves are used along piping at various locations, and in particular are used in piping referred to in the petroleum industry as a christmas tree, which is used as part of a drilling operation.

Actuators to open and close the gate valves may include manual operators, diaphragm-type operators, and hydraulic operators. The actuator may include a bonnet assembly, which interconnects the valve body and the valve gate, and a bonnet stem which is movable with the gate via an operator. It is often desirable to be able to change the operator without changing the bonnet assembly. However, this is difficult because, among other reasons, such a change also requires changes in up-stop and down-stop adjustments which assure the drift of the gate is positioned correctly in the open and closed position. If the valve is connected to a christmas tree or is under

pressure, it may be difficult to determine whether drift adjustments have been made correctly when replacing the operator since the bore of the valve is not available to receive a drift alignment check tool. Removal of a valve under pressure in a christmas tree to make drift adjustments may take considerable time and cause substantial inconvenience.

It is desirable to combine a manual operator with a diaphragm-type or hydraulic operator for back-up and test purposes. This combination typically results in the presence of a top shaft extending from the operator that may also serve to indicate whether the valve is open or closed. Because the top shaft is often exposed to the atmosphere, it may attract contaminants that cause damage to the top shaft seals or bearings. In the past, close tolerances have been required in the top shaft that have exacerbated the contaminant problems. As well, torque applied to the top shaft, which may be caused by manual operation, may cause gate, gate seal, or drift misalignment. Furthermore, changing the top shaft or the top shaft seals has previously required removal of the operator housing.

The operator typically has a maximum force capability for applying to the bonnet stem. It is sometimes desirable to provide additional opening/closing power on a temporary basis without having to remove the original operator. It is also desirable that the same operator be adaptable to various control accessories, such as a mechanical override, hydraulic override, heat sensitive lock open device, block open cap, electrical limit switch and/or other electrical accessories.

Another significant problem, especially related to diaphragm-type operators, is leakage of the diaphragms in the region adjacent the top shaft or bonnet stem. Such leakage may be caused by wear, loss of flexibility, and pinching or wear that occurs should the diaphragm make contact with the diaphragm case. This leakage may gradually develop, and may slowly reduce the operator power.

In some cases, the positioning of the gate valves in the christmas tree and other types of installations may be restricted because of piping which is supplied to operate an automatic actuator that controls gate movement. In the past, it has been difficult to use precisely laid piping because the position of the operator fluid port is fixed with respect to the operator housing. Allowing the operator to rotate with respect to the bonnet could result in leakage or cause misalignment of the up-stop and down-stop drift adjustments of the valve gate.

Thus, there has been a long felt need in the industry to provide an

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study population	
Age (years)	
18-24	10 (10.0)
25-34	15 (15.0)
35-44	20 (20.0)
45-54	25 (25.0)
55-64	30 (30.0)
65-74	35 (35.0)
75-84	40 (40.0)
85-94	45 (45.0)
95-104	50 (50.0)
105-114	55 (55.0)
115-124	60 (60.0)
125-134	65 (65.0)
135-144	70 (70.0)
145-154	75 (75.0)
155-164	80 (80.0)
165-174	85 (85.0)
175-184	90 (90.0)
185-194	95 (95.0)
195-204	100 (100.0)
205-214	105 (105.0)
215-224	110 (110.0)
225-234	115 (115.0)
235-244	120 (120.0)
245-254	125 (125.0)
255-264	130 (130.0)
265-274	135 (135.0)
275-284	140 (140.0)
285-294	145 (145.0)
295-304	150 (150.0)
305-314	155 (155.0)
315-324	160 (160.0)
325-334	165 (165.0)
335-344	170 (170.0)
345-354	175 (175.0)
355-364	180 (180.0)
365-374	185 (185.0)
375-384	190 (190.0)
385-394	195 (195.0)
395-404	200 (200.0)
405-414	205 (205.0)
415-424	210 (210.0)
425-434	215 (215.0)
435-444	220 (220.0)
445-454	225 (225.0)
455-464	230 (230.0)
465-474	235 (235.0)
475-484	240 (240.0)
485-494	245 (245.0)
495-504	250 (250.0)
505-514	255 (255.0)
515-524	260 (260.0)
525-534	265 (265.0)
535-544	270 (270.0)
545-554	275 (275.0)
555-564	280 (280.0)
565-574	285 (285.0)
575-584	290 (290.0)
585-594	295 (295.0)
595-604	300 (300.0)
605-614	305 (305.0)
615-624	310 (310.0)
625-634	315 (315.0)
635-644	320 (320.0)
645-654	325 (325.0)
655-664	330 (330.0)
665-674	335 (335.0)
675-684	340 (340.0)
685-694	345 (345.0)
695-704	350 (350.0)
705-714	355 (355.0)
715-724	360 (360.0)
725-734	365 (365.0)
735-744	370 (370.0)
745-754	375 (375.0)
755-764	380 (380.0)
765-774	385 (385.0)
775-784	390 (390.0)
785-794	395 (395.0)
795-804	400 (400.0)
805-814	405 (405.0)
815-824	410 (410.0)
825-834	415 (415.0)
835-844	420 (420.0)
845-854	425 (425.0)
855-864	430 (430.0)
865-874	435 (435.0)
875-884	440 (440.0)
885-894	445 (445.0)
895-904	450 (450.0)
905-914	455 (455.0)
915-924	460 (460.0)
925-934	465 (465.0)
935-944	470 (470.0)
945-954	475 (475.0)
955-964	480 (480.0)
965-974	485 (485.0)
975-984	490 (490.0)
985-994	495 (495.0)
995-1004	500 (500.0)
1005-1014	505 (505.0)
1015-1024	510 (510.0)
1025-1034	515 (515.0)
1035-1044	520 (520.0)
1045-1054	525 (525.0)
1055-1064	530 (530.0)
1065-1074	535 (535.0)
1075-1084	540 (540.0)
1085-1094	545 (545.0)
1095-1104	550 (550.0)
1105-1114	555 (555.0)
1115-1124	560 (560.0)
1125-1134	565 (565.0)
1135-1144	570 (570.0)
1145-1154	575 (575.0)
1155-1164	580 (580.0)
1165-1174	585

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a valve actuator for moving a valve between open and closed states within a valve body. The valve actuator comprises an operator housing including a pressure chamber and a fluid port, and an operator member movable in response to the introduction of fluid into the pressure chamber through the fluid port. A bonnet housing is securable to the valve body and has a bonnet housing bore therethrough. A bonnet stem axially moves in the bonnet housing bore and is securable to the valve gate for moving the valve gate to the open and closed valve states. The bonnet stem is axially movable in response to movement of the operator member in an axial direction toward the valve body. The bonnet stem is rotatably free with respect to a top shaft.

A downstop member rotatably and axially affixed to the bonnet stem is used for stopping axial movement of the bonnet stem in a direction toward the valve. The downstop is also rotatably free with respect to the top shaft. A stop surface is fixably positioned with respect to the bonnet housing. One or more bonnet stem spacers are disposed on the stop surface and engageable by the downstop to stop axial movement of the bonnet stem for selecting a desired bonnet stem drift.

An object of the present invention is an valve actuator with improved versatility, reduced installation and maintenance, and/or increased life.

Another object of the present invention is an actuator which allows removal or exchange of the valve operator while the valve is under pressure.

Another object of the present invention is an actuator which allows removal or exchange of the valve operator without the need to reset drift adjustments or to examine the valve bore to determine if drift adjustments are correct.

A feature of the present invention is a floating top stem which requires no metal-to-metal contact during operation.

A further feature of a preferred embodiment of the present invention is an improved diaphragm having a metal insert ring to engage an elastomeric seal and thereby minimize or avoid in the diaphragm which may be caused by decreased diaphragm flexibility, leakage pinching or other reasons.

Yet another feature of present invention is a replaceable seal cartridge that allows renewal of top stem seals without removing the operator.

An advantage of the present invention is an economical construction for a valve actuator that is relatively simple yet reliable in construction, and is easy to service.

These and other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the drawings, the descriptions given herein, and the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is an elevational view, partially in section, of a diaphragm-type valve actuator in accord with the present invention;

FIG. 1A is an elevational view, partially in section, of a block open cap attachable to the valve actuator of FIG. 1;

FIG. 2 is an elevational view, partially in section, of a bonnet assembly in accord with the present invention;

FIG. 3 is an elevational view, partially in section, of the bonnet assembly of FIG. 2 including drift adjustment lengths in accord with the present invention;

FIG. 4 is an elevational view, of a replaceable operator without readjustment of the down-stop or up-stop drift in a bonnet assembly in accord with the present invention;

FIG. 5 is a schematical representation of actuator accessory connections in accord with the present invention;

FIG. 6 is an elevational view, partially in section, of a dual actuator assembly in accord with the present invention; and

FIG. 7 is an elevational view, partially in section, of a hydraulic valve actuator in accord with the present invention.

While the present invention will be described in connection with presently preferred embodiments, it will be understood that it is not intended to limit the invention to those embodiments. On the contrary, it is intended to cover all alternatives, modifications, and equivalents included within the spirit of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to the drawings, and more particularly to FIG. 1, a diaphragm-type valve actuator 10 is shown in accord with the present invention. Top shaft 12, which is preferably formed from stainless steel, effectively floats with respect to top diaphragm case 14. As a general matter, all non-stainless metallic components in actuator 10 are preferably coated for protection against environmental conditions. Wear bearing 16, as well as wear bearings 18 (shown in detail in FIG. 2), are preferably non-metallic to eliminate close tolerance problems normally associated with the actuator top shaft and bonnet stem. The wear bearings effectively suspend top shaft 12 and bonnet stem 20 to thereby prevent metallic contact during operation. Thus, the wear bearings are preferably non-metallic and made from relatively hard plastic-like materials, such as Molygard, Nylatron, or Delrin. The wear bearings and other plastic-like components discussed hereinafter may also be made from various plastic-like materials such as, but not limited to, nylons, thermoplastics, resins, polyurethanes, phenolics, acetals, polyacrylates, epoxides, polycarbonates, polyester, aramids, polymers, molythane 90, and fluorelastomers.

Top shaft 12 rotates independently of and is designed to eliminate transmission of torque to bonnet stem 20, gate 22, and/or gate seats (not shown) when using a manual override, such as manual override 24 shown in FIG. 5. Top shaft 12 preferably is large enough in diameter to prevent bearing and buckling stresses when loaded by manual override 24 or hydraulic override 26 shown in FIG. 5. (See also the dual actuator system of FIG. 6 and hydraulic actuator of FIG. 7). A large bottom shoulder 28 on top shaft 12 prevents top shaft 12 from being expelled from actuator 10.

Top seal cartridge 30 can be removed for replacement as a single unit without disassembling top diaphragm housing 14. Top seal cartridge 30 is preferably formed of a plastic-like material such as Delrin and is held in place by retainer ring 32 which is preferably stainless steel. Top seal cartridge 30 incorporates rod wiper 34 to keep the shaft sealing region therebelow clean of dirt, grease, and other contaminants for longer life of the seals. Rod wiper 34 is preferably made from Molythane 90. Top seal cartridge 30 contains dual reciprocating stem seals 36 and dual static seals 38 to ensure seal integrity and long life. These and other seals may be T-seals or other substantially elastomeric seals, such as O-ring seals.

Diaphragm 40 is preferably formed of nitrile laminated with several

layers of nylon to ensure strength and flexibility for years of service. Materials such as Viton, a fluoroelastomer, may be used for H₂S - CO₂ applications. The layers of nylon in diaphragm 40 eliminate the need for lubrication and do not experience frictional wear. Diaphragm 40 includes stainless steel concentric insert seal ring 42 bonded thereto to act in conjunction with a static O-ring face seal disposed in 42 seal groove 44, which is provided in the diaphragm retaining nut 46. This seal eliminates leakage in the stem area which may normally occur due to diaphragm aging, pinching, or reduced flexibility.

Diaphragm retaining nut 46 threadably engages diaphragm retainer plate 48 for easy, accurate installation. On up strokes of actuator 10, diaphragm retaining nut 46 prevents any possible pinching of diaphragm 40 by stopping movement of bonnet stem 20 should diaphragm retaining nut 46 engage top plug 50. Diaphragm retaining nut 46 provides dual stem seals 52 to engage and reliably seal top shaft 12. Diaphragm retaining nut 46 is preferably formed of stainless steel.

Diaphragm retainer plate 48 engages downstop element 54 for downward axial movement of gate 22 via bonnet stem 20 when the cavity defined by top diaphragm housing 14 is filled with pressurized fluid, i.e. compressed air. Breather port 62 allows fluid (air) to flow out of lower diaphragm housing 64 as diaphragm retainer plate 48 moves downwardly. Downstop element 54 preferably is connected to bonnet stem 20 via large threads designed to withstand high load impacts and cycling for preventing changes in drift settings, as discussed hereinafter. Downstop element is also engaged by upper spring retainer 56 for upward movement of bonnet stem 20 induced by spring 58 and/or pressure within valve body 60.

Top diaphragm housing 14 is sealingly secured to lower diaphragm housing 64 by bolts 66 and nuts 68 which secure diaphragm 40 therebetween. Diaphragm 40 is thus anchored by this connection and acts as a seal between the top diaphragm housing 14 and the lower diaphragm housing 64. Base plate ring 70 is secured to lower diaphragm housing by bolts 72. Base plate ring 70 allows for 360 degree actuator rotation when exacting plumbing is required for connections to control pressure inlet 74. Lower spring retainer 88 secures spring 58 into a centralized position. In Fig. 1A is shown lock open cap 76 which threadably engages top plug 50 and is secured to top shaft 12 with bolt 78 to secure the valve in the open position.

Fig. 2 discloses a portion of bonnet assembly 90. Bonnet assembly is shown complete with spring 58 in Fig. 4. Preferably stainless steel stem spacers 92 are

Bonnet stem threads 21 are designed so that no injury to the seals occurs when the stem is passed through packing cartridge 96. Dual bearings 18 suspend bonnet stem 20 to preferably prevent contact of any metal surface thereby eliminating wear and galling to either the bonnet stem 20 or the packing cartridge 96. To prevent rotation of bonnet ring 94 with respect to bonnet housing 98, screw 106 is tightened into the corresponding groove or inset disposed adjacent the end portion of bonnet housing 98. Rotation of bonnet ring 94 with respect to bonnet housing 98 may alter the stroke length adjustments as discussed hereinafter. Bonnet ring 94 retains packing cartridge 96 in position within bonnet housing 98. Bonnet ring 94 also preferably includes an additional seal 102 for safety purposes.

Secondary metal-to-metal stem seal 112 provides sealing in the event of fire damage to the other seals and also acts as a stop for upward movement of gate 22. The adjustment of the up-stop drift is made in a manner dependent upon valve manufacture designs but may typically involve threadably engaging the gate with the bonnet stem and rotating until the correct adjustment is reached. Further rotation may be prevented by such means as a pin or other retainer means.

Fig. 4 discloses the relative ease with which various operators 114 may be changed out without altering the up-stop and down-stop drift as discussed

Fig. 5 is a schematic disclosing numerous attachments that can be made to upper plug 50 and inlet valve 74 of actuator 10. Upper plug 50 preferably includes a substantially large diameter threaded outer connection to avoid stresses when using accessories. Clear stem protector 116 protects top shaft 12 from adverse effects of weather, sandblasting, contaminating operating environments, and painting. Heat sensitive lock open device 118 mechanically holds open the actuator and valve when other safety systems are inoperative. This device locks the device in the down position allowing it to rise only in the event of fire. Mechanical override 24 is used to mechanically stroke the valve, and is preferably used on low pressure valves or during installation and testing. Electrical limit switch contact 20 permits remote indication of gate valve position. Various types of fusible plugs 122, quick exhaust valves 124, pneumatic relays 126, and other sensors 128 may be used with inlet 74 and top stem 12.

Fig. 6 discloses a dual actuator system which may be used to double the stroke power. Secondary operator 140 preferably threadably attaches to plug 143 via connector 141. Lock down plug 154 prevents rotation of operator 140 with respect to operator 10. Operation of secondary operator 140 is similar to that of single actuator 10. Pressurized fluid enters fluid port 142 causing diaphragm plate 144 to move downwardly, thereby forcing stem adaptor 146 and top shaft 148 downwardly. Air is

Fig. 7 discloses a hydraulic valve actuator 200 embodiment of the present invention. Top shaft 202 is kept clean via rod wiper 204 disposed within removable top plug 206. Dual wear bearings 208, preferably formed of molygard, are used to support top shaft 202. Top plug 206 also includes a Polypak seal 210, preferably formed of Nitroxile. Hydraulic pressure moves piston 212 axially downwardly to move downstop 214 into engagement with stem spacers 216 as described hereinbefore. Piston 212 floats on preferably non-metallic wear bearings 218 and is further sealed with seals 220. Upper spring retainer 222 applies force from coil 224 to move downstop 214 upwardly. Base plate ring 226 is bolted to housing 228 and provides support for lower spring retainer 230 as described with respect to diaphragm-type actuator 10.

The foregoing detailed disclosure and description of the invention is illustrative and explanatory thereof, and it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, that various changes in the size, shape and materials as well as in the details of the illustrated construction, reliability configurations, or combinations of features of the various valve actuator elements of the present invention may be made without departing from the spirit of the invention.

a diaphragm retainer nut for retaining said flexible diaphragm in a fixed position with respect to said operator member, said diaphragm retainer nut having a circular groove disposed therein for receiving said elastomeric face seal.

said base ring is configured for rotation with respect to said bonnet housing without affecting said selected bonnet stem drift for permitting said fluid port to be selectively rotated with respect to said bonnet housing.

a top shaft extending from said operator housing, said top shaft being axially movable through said top shaft aperture and within said pressure chamber, said top shaft being sealingly rotatable with respect to said operator housing and rotatable with respect to said bonnet stem.

non-metallic bearings for supporting said top shaft to avoid metal-to-metal contact during axial movement of said top shaft.

a seal cartridge disposed within said top shaft aperture of said operator housing, said seal cartridge having a top shaft bore therethrough with a seal therein for sealingly engaging said top shaft, said seal cartridge having an outer surface with a seal thereon for sealingly engaging said top shaft aperture; and

a retainer ring for retaining said seal cartridge within said top shaft aperture, said retainer ring and said seal cartridge being removable from said top shaft aperture without removing said operator housing from said bonnet housing.

said seal cartridge is comprised of a non-metallic material.

9. The apparatus of Claim 1, further comprising:

a lock member for rotatably and axially securing said bonnet ring to said bonnet housing to prevent a change in said selected bonnet stem drift.

a seal cartridge secured within said bonnet housing bore by said bonnet ring, said seal cartridge having an inner seal for engaging said bonnet stem and an outer seal for engaging said bonnet housing bore, said seal cartridge having a non-metallic wear bearing for supporting said bonnet stem.

a top shaft extendable through said top plug and into said pressure chamber, said top shaft being movable axially to apply force to said bonnet stem; and

12. A valve actuator for moving a valve gate between open and closed valve positions with a valve body, said valve actuator comprising:

a first operator member within said first operator housing movable in response to introduction of fluid into said operator housing pressure chamber through said fluid entry port;

a bonnet stem axially moveable in said bonnet housing bore and securable to said valve gate for moving said valve gate to said open and closed valve position, said bonnet stem being axially movable in response to movement of said first operator member with respect to said valve body;

a downstop member rotatably and axially affixed to said bonnet stem for stopping axial movement of said bonnet stem with respect to said valve body;

a base ring connected to said bonnet housing in surrounding relationship therewith for securing said first operator housing to said bonnet housing.

a second operator member being operable to apply force to said top stem for moving said bonnet stem.

first and second diaphragms for applying force to a plate portion of each of said respective first and second operator members.

said first actuator member is a hydraulically driven piston.

16. A method of opening and closing a valve comprising the steps of:
fixably securing a downstop member to a bonnet stem;
adjusting a bonnet stem drift with one or more stem spacers carried by a bonnet housing;
applying pressurized fluid to a operator housing;
moving said downstop member and the bonnet stem axially towards said valve in response to said step of applying pressurized fluid to said operator housing;
engaging said downstop member against said one or more stem spacers to stop axial movement of said bonnet stem and close said valve;
removing pressurized fluid from said operator housing;
applying force to said bonnet stem with a biasing member to move said bonnet stem axially away from said valve in response to said step of removing pressurized fluid to open said valve; and
removing said operator housing from said bonnet housing without affecting said bonnet stem drift.

17. The method of Claim 17, further comprising:
providing a metallic insert on a diaphragm; and
sealing around said metallic insert with an elastomeric seal member.

18. The method of Claim 17, further comprising:
providing a top shaft extending from said operator housing; and
applying axial force to said top shaft to move said bonnet stem axially while preventing said top shaft from applying torque to said bonnet stem.

19. The method of Claim 18, further comprising:
disposing a shaft seal and an operator housing bore seal on a top shaft sealing cartridge; and
inserting said top shaft sealing cartridge into a operator housing bore in said operator housing without removing said operator housing from said bonnet housing.

20. The method of Claim 17, further comprising:
applying additional force to said bonnet stem with a second operator.

ABSTRACT

[illegible]

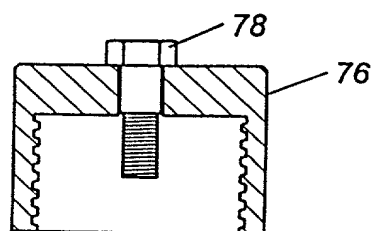


FIG. 1A

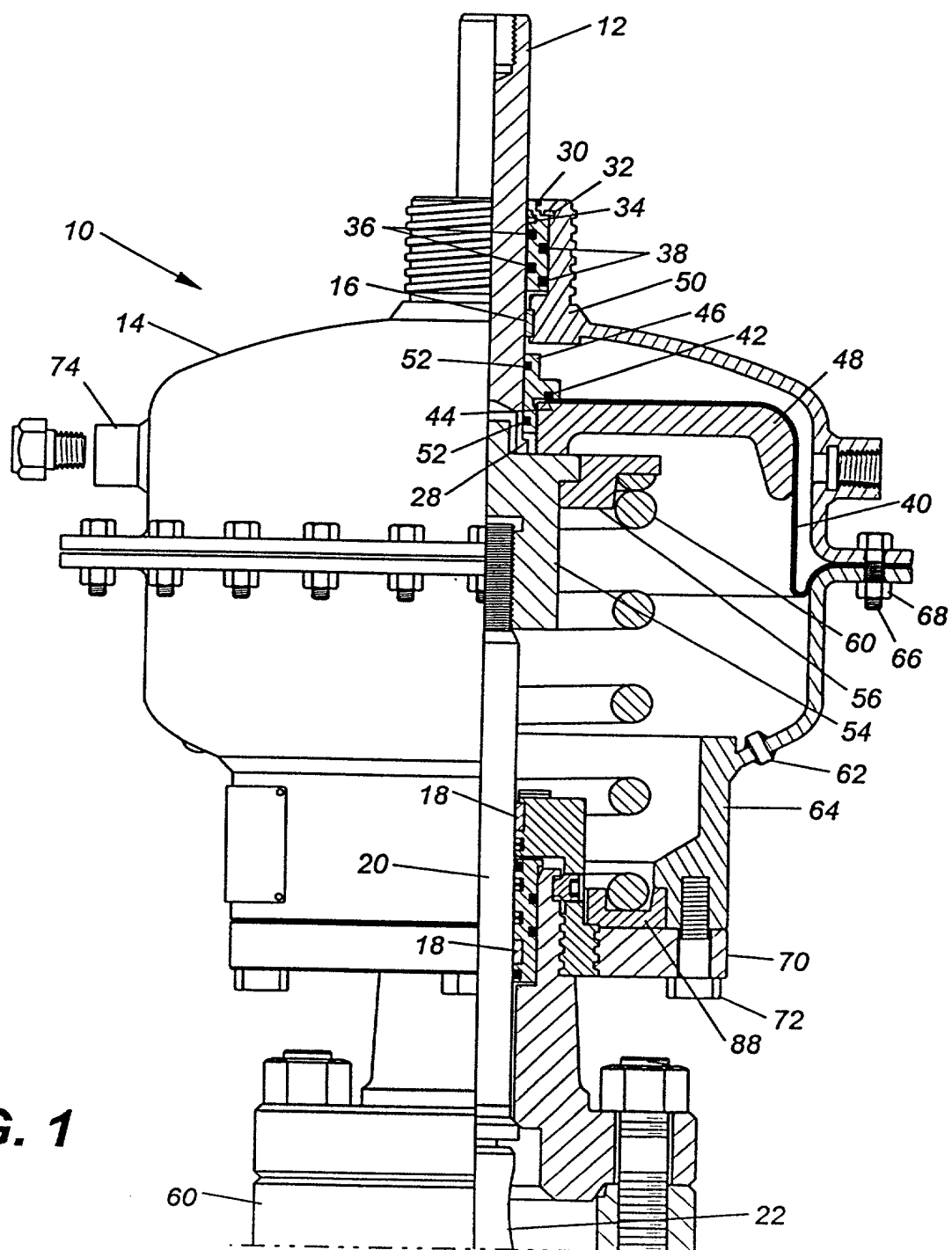


FIG. 1

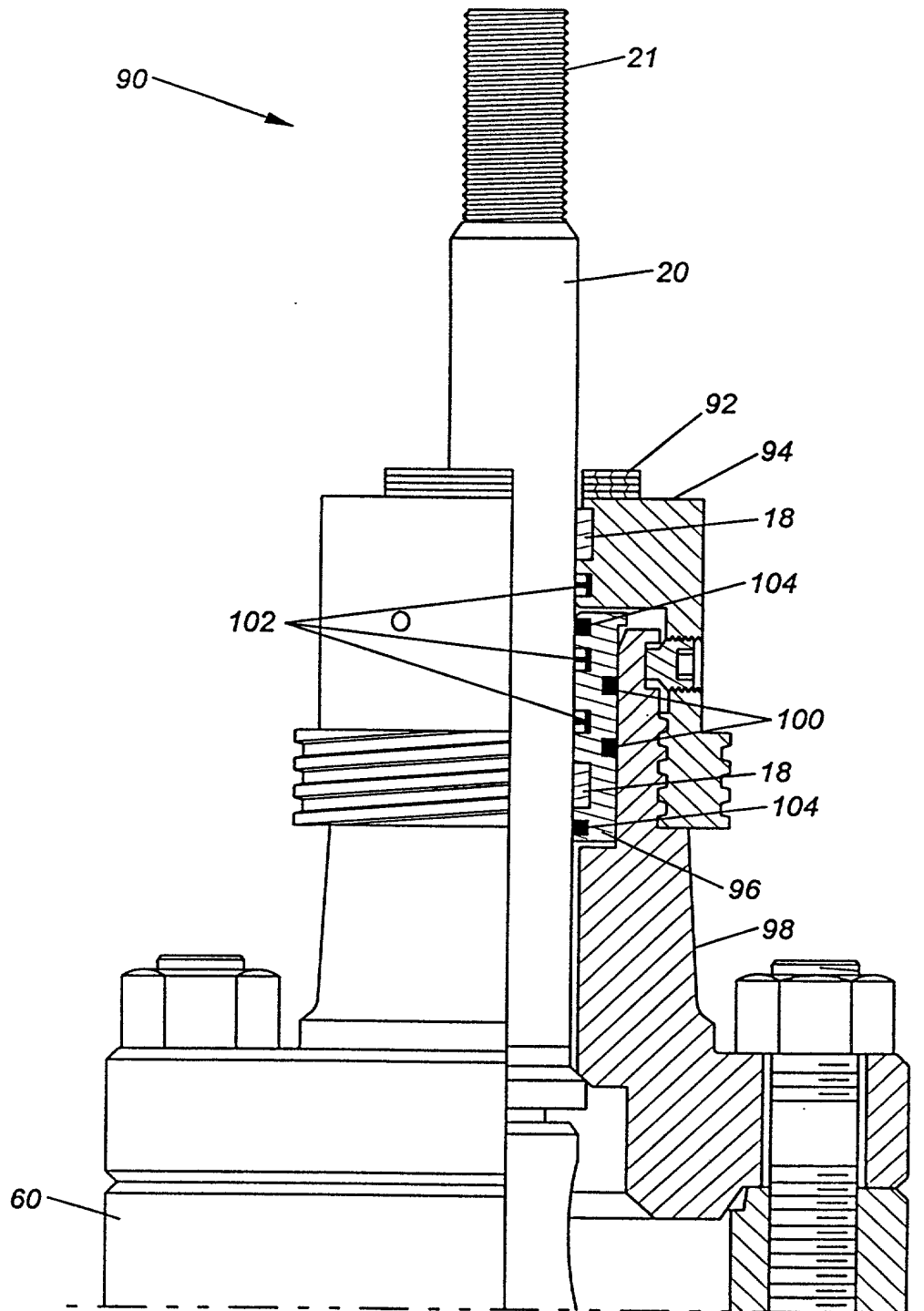
**FIG. 2**

FIG. 3

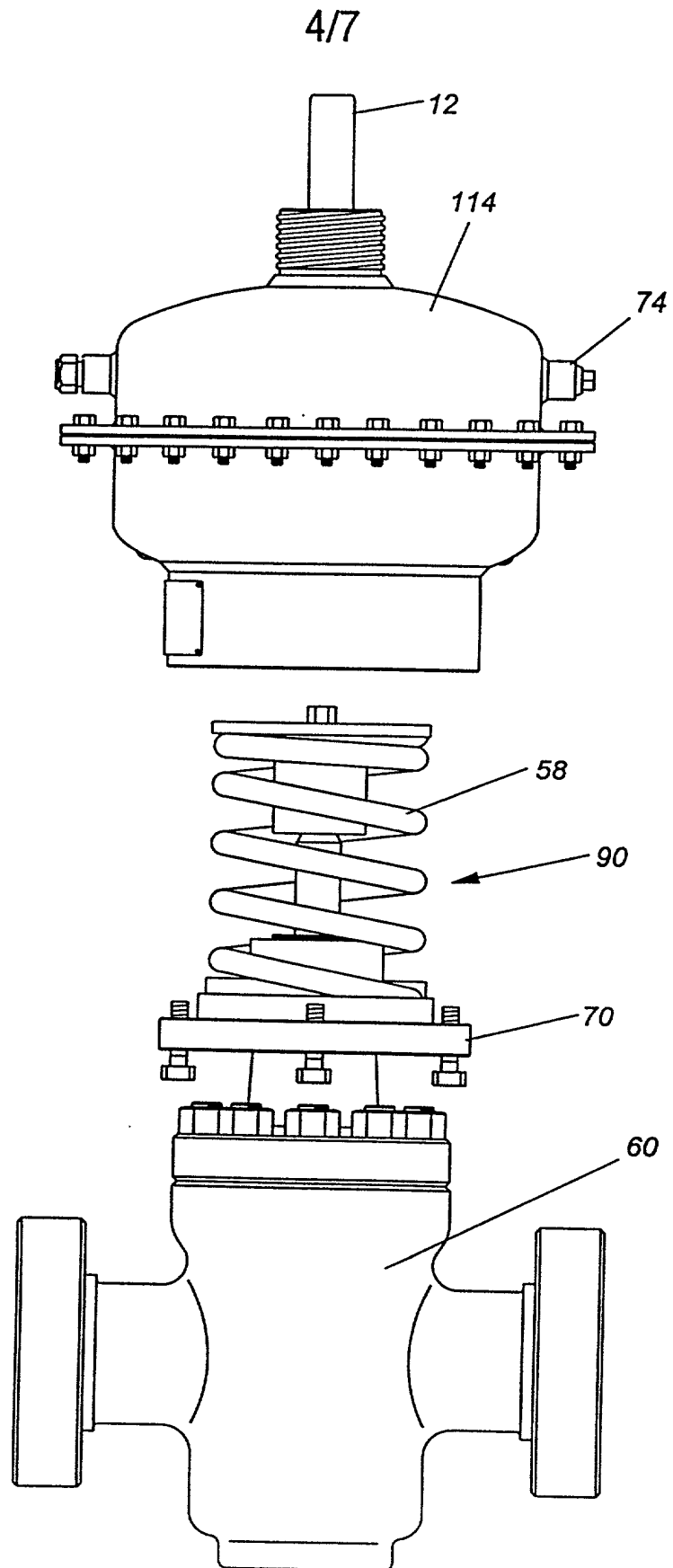


FIG. 4

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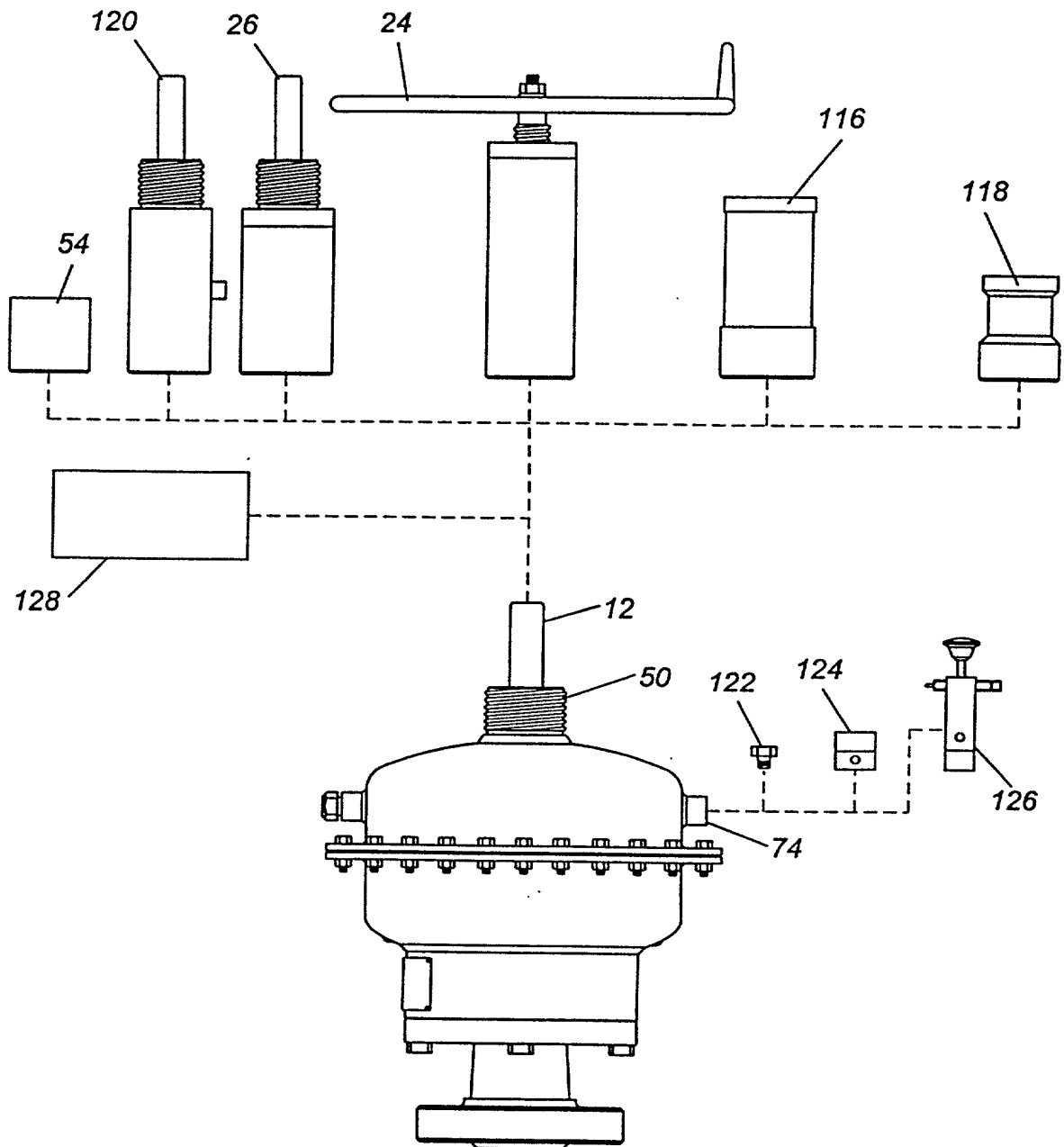


FIG. 5

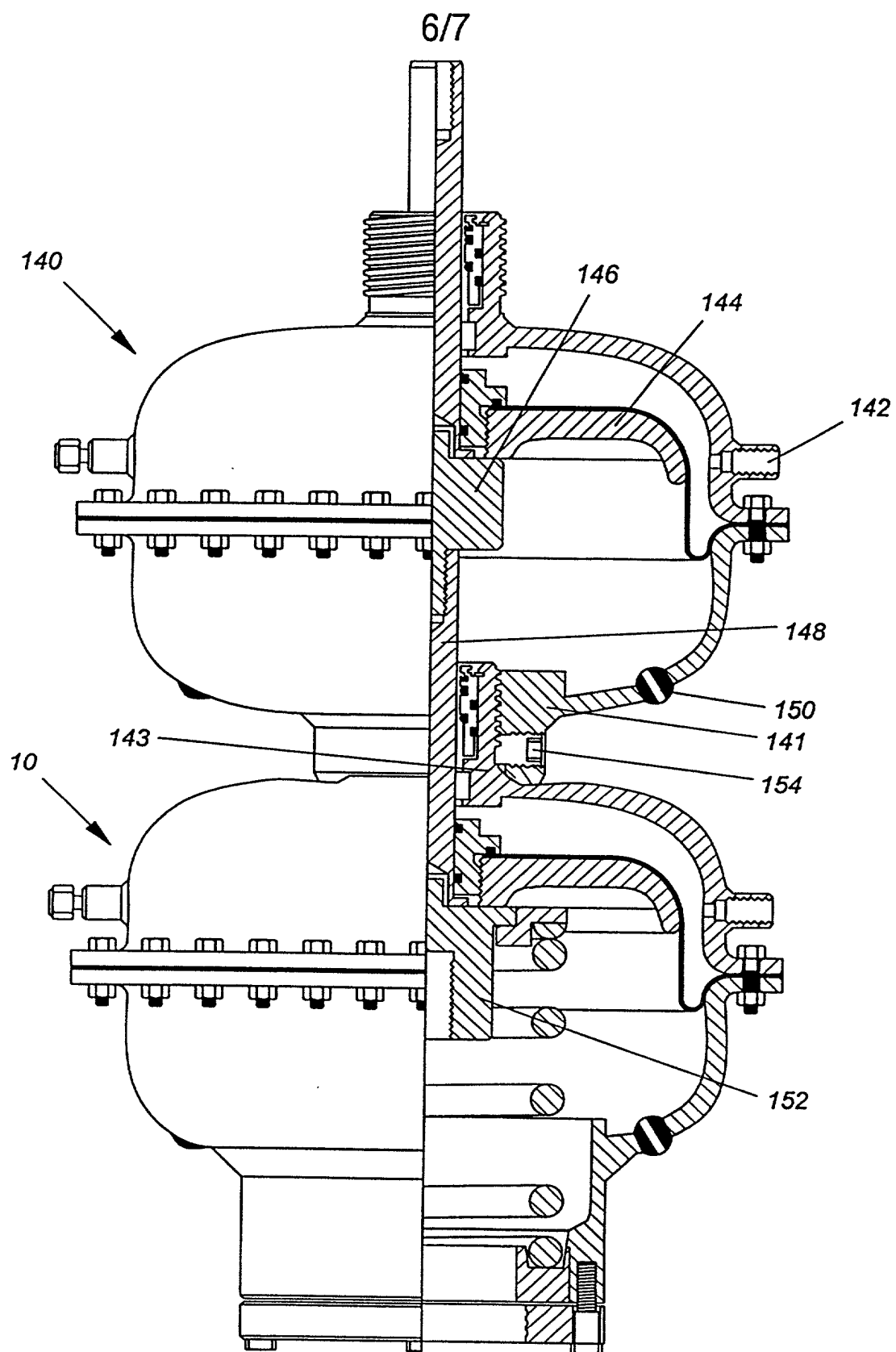
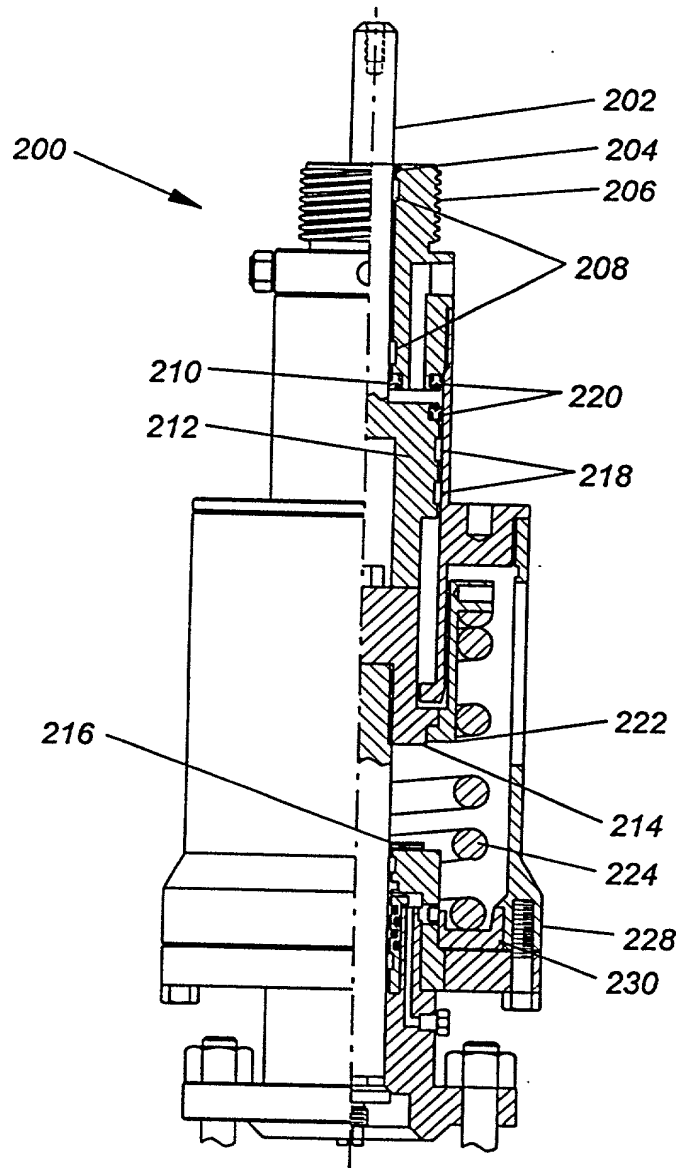


FIG. 6

**FIG. 7**